

**IN THE CLAIMS**

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (currently amended): A branching passage assembly for an endoscope comprising:

a forked branching member internally positioned in a casing of a manipulating head assembly to connect a base end of a biopsy channel running through an insertion tube of said endoscope with a biopsy channel entrance way and a suction passage,

wherein said forked branching member is retained in position by threaded engagement with an inner end of a biopsy channel entrance pipe fitted in said biopsy channel entrance way, and said forked branching member is associated with restrictive members arranged to restrict movements of said branching member in all directions except a movement in a direction toward said biopsy channel entrance pipe when said branching member is pulled toward the latter for threaded engagement therewith, said casing of said manipulating head assembly is formed by joining a main cover section and a grip cover section, and arranged to support a manipulating member of an angulation control mechanism on said main cover section and to accommodate said branching member internally of said grip cover section, said branching member is located internally in passage-forming structural members including first and second tubular members provided internally in said casing of said manipulating head assembly to extend from said main cover section to said grip cover section and connected with each other through a reinforcing ring, and a notched void portion is provided in part of said first tubular member and said reinforcing ring, said second tubular member being fitted on said reinforcing ring, said forked branching member having a threaded connecting portion projected toward said biopsy channel entrance pipe through said notched void portion, said restrictive members being constituted by a pair of laterally projecting stopper blades provided on said branching member, said stopper blades being

placed in said notched void portion and held in abutting engagement with vertical and horizontal surfaces at notched portions of said reinforcing ring within said second tubular member.

Claims 2-4 (canceled)

Claim 5 (currently amended): A branching passage assembly as defined in claim [[3]] 1, wherein said first and second tubular members comprise a lightweight metal, and said reinforcing ring is a high strength metal ring.

Claim 6 (previously presented): A branching passage assembly as defined in claim 1, wherein said forked branching member is configured to be connected to a first connecting portion for connection of a biopsy channel tube, a second connecting portion for connection of a suction tube, and a third connecting portion for connection of a biopsy channel entrance pipe.

Claim 7 (original): A branching passage assembly as defined in claim 6, wherein said third connecting portion is provided with an external screw on an outer peripheral surface while said biopsy channel entrance pipe is provided with an internal screw to be brought into threaded engagement with said external screw of said third connecting portion.

Claim 8 (original): A branching passage assembly as defined in claim 7, wherein said biopsy channel entrance pipe is placed in said biopsy channel entrance way on said manipulating head assembly and threaded onto said third connecting portion, and a mouth piece with a plug member is threaded into said biopsy channel entrance way with a fore end portion thereof in fitting engagement with a rear or outer end portion of said biopsy channel entrance pipe.

Claim 9 (original): A branching passage assembly as defined in claim 8, wherein passage-forming structural members are fitted in said casing of said manipulating head assembly, and said restrictive members are constituted by stopper portions formed integrally

with said branching member and adapted to restrict movements of said branching member in upward, downward and forward directions, and said mouth piece is fitted on said biopsy channel entrance pipe in such a way as to press said restrictive members against a passage-forming structural member.

Claim 10 (original): A branching passage assembly as defined in claim 9, wherein said first connecting portion is formed with an external screw portion on outer periphery thereof on the rear side of a tapered fore end portion, said biopsy channel tube being fitted on said tapered fore end portion of said first connecting portion and anchored in position by a retaining nut threaded onto said external screw portion, and said passage-forming structural member being provided with holes at positions around said retaining nut thereby permitting to separate said retaining nut from said external screw portion from outside of said passage-forming structural member.

Claim 11 (currently amended): A branching passage assembly for an endoscope comprising:

- a manipulating head assembly having a casing;

- a forked branching member internally positioned in the casing of the manipulating head assembly and configured to connect a base end of a biopsy channel running through an insertion tube of the endoscope with a biopsy channel entrance way and a suction passage, the forked branching member being retained in position by threaded engagement with an inner end of a biopsy channel entrance pipe fitted in the biopsy channel entrance way; and

- restrictive means for restricting movements of the branching member in all directions except a movement in a direction toward the biopsy channel entrance pipe when the branching member is pulled toward the biopsy channel entrance pipe for threaded engagement therewith,

wherein the casing of the manipulating head assembly is formed by joining a main cover section and a grip cover section, and arranged to support a manipulating member of an angulation control mechanism on the main cover section and to accommodate the branching member internally in the grip cover section, the branching member is located internally in passage-forming structural members including first and second tubular members provided internally in the casing of the manipulating head assembly to extend from the main cover section to the grip cover section and connected with each other through a reinforcing ring, and a notched void portion is provided in part of the first tubular member and the reinforcing ring, the second tubular member being fitted on the reinforcing ring, the forked branching member having a threaded connecting portion projected toward the biopsy channel entrance pipe through the notched void portion, the restrictive means comprising a pair of laterally projecting stopper blades provided on the branching member, the stopper blades being placed in the notched void portion and held in abutting engagement with vertical and horizontal surfaces at notched portions of the reinforcing ring within the second tubular member.

Claims 12-14 (canceled)

Claim 15 (currently amended): A branching passage assembly as defined in claim [[13]] 11, wherein the first and second tubular members comprise a lightweight metal, and the reinforcing ring comprises a high strength metal ring.

Claim 16 (previously presented): A branching passage assembly as defined in claim 11, wherein the forked branching member is configured to be connected to a first connecting portion of a biopsy channel tube, a second connecting portion of a suction tube, and a third connecting portion of a biopsy channel entrance pipe.

Claim 17 (previously presented): A branching passage assembly as defined in claim 16, wherein the third connecting portion has an external screw on an outer peripheral surface

while the biopsy channel entrance pipe has an internal screw to be brought into threaded engagement with the external screw of the third connecting portion.

Claim 18 (previously presented): A branching passage assembly as defined in claim 17, wherein the biopsy channel entrance pipe is placed in the biopsy channel entrance way on the manipulating head assembly and threaded onto the third connecting portion, and a mouth piece with a plug member is threaded into the biopsy channel entrance way with a fore end portion thereof in fitting engagement with a rear or outer end portion of the biopsy channel entrance pipe.

Claim 19 (previously presented): A branching passage assembly as defined in claim 18, further comprising passage-forming structural members fitted in the casing of the manipulating head assembly, wherein the restrictive means comprises stopper portions formed integrally with the branching member and configured to restrict movements of the branching member in upward, downward and forward directions, and the mouth piece is fitted on the biopsy channel entrance pipe in such a way as to press the restrictive members against a passage-forming structural member.

Claim 20 (previously presented): A branching passage assembly as defined in claim 19, wherein the first connecting portion has an external screw portion on outer periphery thereof on the rear side of a tapered fore end portion, the biopsy channel tube being fitted on the tapered fore end portion of the first connecting portion and anchored in position by a retaining nut threaded onto the external screw portion, and the passage-forming structural member being provided with holes at positions around the retaining nut thereby permitting to separate the retaining nut from the external screw portion from outside of the passage-forming structural member.